

WEEKEND WAVE

4-3-15



Friday Economic Roundup

BY THE NUMBERS

Charlotte growth outpaces Sarasota

By Brian Gleason, Editorial Page Editor Charlotte Sun

While the North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota Metropolitan Statistical Area cracked the Top 20 in population growth nationally from July 1, 2013 to July 1, 2014, Charlotte County wasn't far behind in 21st place and actually topped Sarasota County.

The North Port MSA, which is comprised of Manatee and Sarasota counties, grew by 16,049 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, a 2.19 percent increase. The Punta Gorda MSA, which includes all of Charlotte County, added 3,526 people, or 2.13 percent. The North Port MSA's figure was boosted by strong population growth in Manatee County, which grew by 9,329 people, or 2.72 percent. Sarasota County added 6,720 residents, a 1.72 percent increase.

If Charlotte County growth stayed at the same pace for the second half of 2014, its population has already exceeded 170,000 people for the first time. The Census Bureau's estimated population for Charlotte County was 168,474 as of July 1, 2014.

That figure exceeds the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business

Research's estimate for 2015 of 166,304. The 2.13 percent growth rate also exceeds the county's long-term rate of 1.7 percent annually from 1990 to 2013, according to BEBR. When that milestone is confirmed in next year's estimates, it will have taken Charlotte County only four years to add 10,000 people, surpassing the 160,000 mark in 2010 and the 170,000 mark in 2014.

Sarasota also likely hit a milestone by the end of 2014, surpassing 400,000 people. As of July 1, 2014, the county's population was 396,962, having added 6,720 people. The county almost certainly added 3,038 people in the final six months of 2014 to reach 400,000.

The Census Bureau's next release of estimates for municipalities and Census Designated Places (such as Port Charlotte) is due in May. The City of North Port's official population estimate is expected to exceed 60,000 for the first time.

DeSoto County reversed a two-year population decline, rising to 35,012 residents as of July 1, 2014, from 34,616 in 2013. DeSoto's population in the 2010 Census was 34,862.

Jobless rate falls as snowbirds come to nest

By GARY ROBERTS STAFF WRITER

Fueled by a record-breaking number of seasonal visitors, and the jobs they bring, hiring increased across the board and across the region last month.

The jobless rate in Charlotte County dropped to 6.1 percent in February, down from 6.4 percent the previous month. In February 2014, the county's unemployment rate was 6.9 percent. The local figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Similarly, monthly unemployment numbers in Sarasota and DeSoto counties also receded. Sarasota posted a 5.3 percent jobless rate last month, following January's 5.6 percent rate. A year ago, Sarasota County stood at 6.1 percent.

DeSoto County's jobless rate dropped from 6.5 percent in January to 6.2 percent last month. In February 2014, DeSoto saw an even 7 percent unemployment.

"The number of snowbirds coming down here is so much more than past years; it's shocking, but good," said Debbie Guilbault, center supervisor for CareerSource Southwest Florida in Charlotte County. "We've seen a lot of seasonal hiring, more than usual, that's for sure. And we're really glad for it."

Guilbault said her office received nearly 100 job orders in February, almost 30 percent more than the previous month. And besides the typical local hires in retail and health care, she said there is increased demand for a full range of positions, particularly the trades.

"That shows the construction industry is coming back," she said. "We're seeing a lot of jobs out there. I was surprised."

Add local government to the list of job creators. The Punta Gorda metropolitan statistical area, which includes all of Charlotte County, had the highest annual employment growth rate in government of all Florida's metro areas, at 3.4 percent. Charlotte County government has hired more personnel to handle the upsurge in construction activity, including in permitting and licensing, county officials said.

Surrounding areas are doing well in other labor sectors.

The CareerSource Southwest Florida Sarasota-Manatee metro area saw an over-the-year growth rate of 10 percent in the construction industry. In the DeSoto-Hardee-Highlands metro area, the annual job growth rates for professional and business services soared 42.9 percent.

Guilbault points to this summer's planned opening of an Aldi in North Port as an example of new businesses coming to the area. The discount supermarket is expected to hire about 20 employees for the new store at U.S. 41 and Salford Boulevard.

To fill these slots, the value grocery chain will play host to a hiring event from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday at the Wyvern Hotel, 101 E. Retta Esplanade, Punta Gorda.

Florida's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 5.6 percent in February, down from the previous month's rate of 5.7 percent, and the 6.5 percent jobless rate of a year ago. The U.S. unemployment rate was 5.5 percent in February.

Compared to February 2014, the number of jobs in the state was up by 266,600, an increase of 3.5 percent. Nationally, the number of jobs was up 2.4 percent over the year. Florida's annual jobgrowth rate has exceeded the nation's rate since April 2012.

Prolific Charlotte County investor adds warehouse to its collection

By Michael Braga, Herald-Tribune

Paul D'Allesandro sold a 7,070-square-foot warehouse at 1231 Market Circle in the Port Charlotte Industrial Park to Moonshine Holdings LLC for \$830,000.

D'Allesandro bought the building in October 1999 for \$475,000. It was built in 1986. Moonstone Holdings, a Cape Haze company managed by Doreen Gentz, financed the purchase with a \$600,000 loan from the seller.

Since May 2012, Gentz's company has spent more than \$2.7 million to buy commercial and residential real estate in Charlotte County.

Included in that total is a 5,976-square-foot medical office building at 3005 Caring Way in Port Charlotte that Moonstone Holdings bought for \$800,000 in December 2012 and five units totaling 5,120 square feet in a retail shopping mall at 2828 S McCall Road in Englewood that it bought for \$351,000 in December 2014.

Moonstone Holdings also spent \$656,500 on nine rental cottages and nine apartment units. And it spent nearly \$100,000 on nine parcels of vacant land.

Accepting Applications for RESTORE Funding

The Charlotte County RESTORE (Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies) Act Advisory Board is accepting applications for project funding requests. RESTORE funds apply to programs, projects, and activities that restore and protect the environment and economy of the Gulf Coast. Applications are available online - visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click "[RESTORE Act Funding Application](#)" in the Hot Topics list. Paper copies are available in Administration at 18500 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte. Application deadline: 5:00 p.m. Friday, April 17, 2015. For more information, call 941.743.1944.

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Tourist season coming to end ... or is it? ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Florida among the best states for doctors ([Jacksonville Business Journal](#))
- Wine company plans to grow business in new Florida markets ([Jacksonville Business Journal](#))

US ECONOMIC NEWS

- Business forecasters boost outlook for US economy ([12 News](#))
- Streak of strong US hiring likely extended into March ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- U.S. jobless data boosts labor market picture ([Reuters](#))

ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

- To gain influence, persuade, don't coerce ([Jerry Osteryoung](#))
- UCF to receive \$1 million in grants to help entrepreneurs ([Bright House Networks](#))
- Brick-and-mortar stores can survive and thrive in an e-commerce world ([Gainesville Business Report](#))

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